

# “We all share the same fears...”

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## Introduction

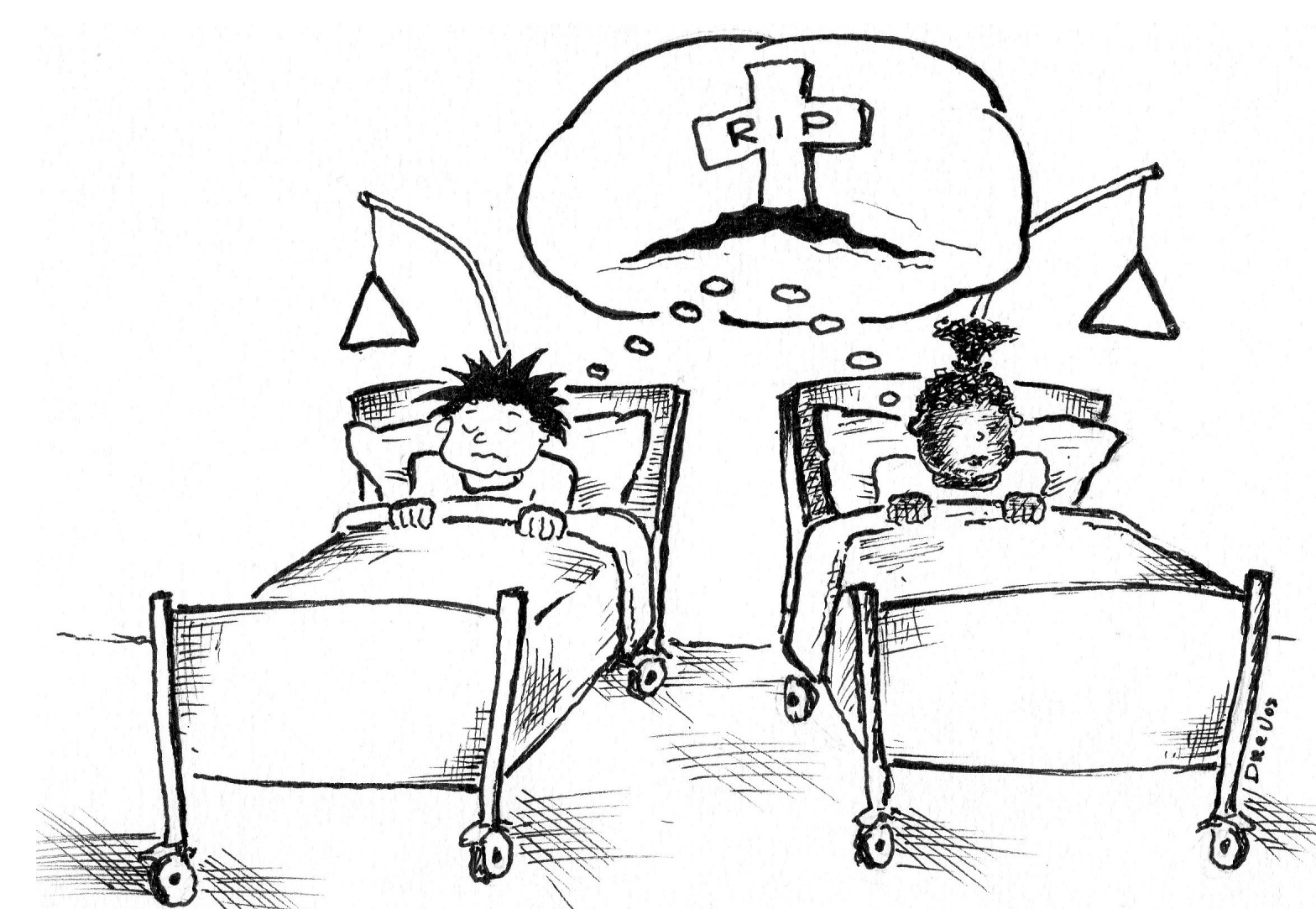
The rising number of immigrants in Western Europe has implications in many areas, including healthcare. This subpopulation has difficulties in finding their way into the complexity of the health care system, especially when being diagnosed with a life threatening illness such as cancer. Although, there is an urgent need for insight and knowledge about these patients, most research excludes this population, because of the various difficulties it entails. This study intended to capture the meaning of having a life threatening illness in a migration country, and to study the expectations and experiences of non-western immigrant patients about the provided care in Belgium.

## Methods

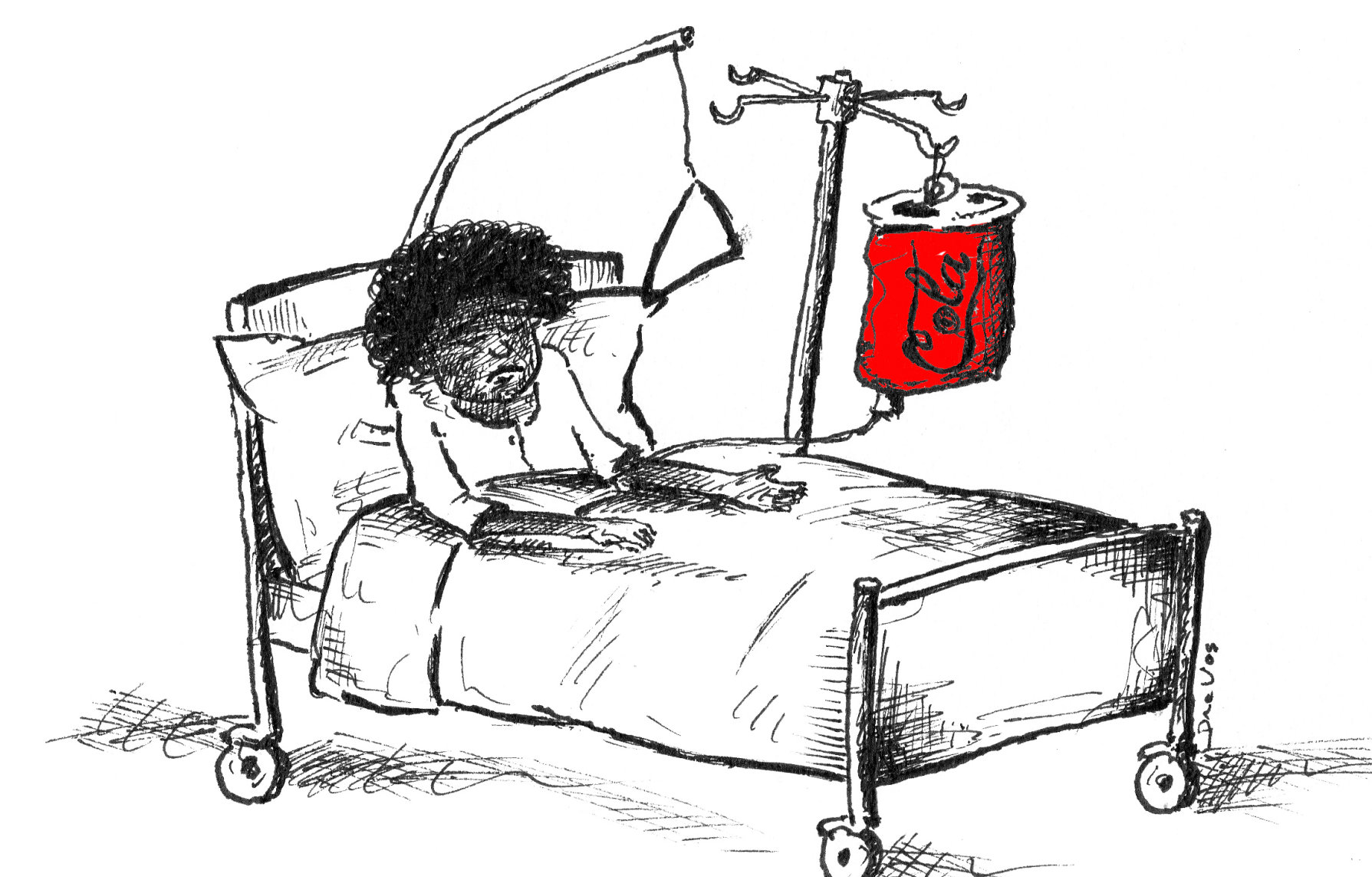
Thirty adult non-western immigrant cancer patients were interviewed by means of an in-depth interview technique. The interviews were coded using thematic analysis.

## Results

Having a life threatening illness is in essence a **human experience**, regardless of one's country of origin. Patients showed universal reactions and reaction patterns when confronted with cancer and dealing with the cancer treatment. Nevertheless, there were some obstacles.



The **language barrier** between immigrant patients and healthcare workers seems the most important obstacle in the care for these patients. Moreover, more than half of the interviewed patients preferred independent interpreters instead of family members for translation during consultations.



Finally, we noticed throughout the interviews a general lack of (accurate) **basic knowledge** about health and illness, resulting in an enormous need for (medical) information.

## Discussion

In general, we found strong resemblances in the expectations and perceived experiences between immigrant and native patients when confronted with cancer. However, in many interviews we saw important obstacles while dealing with the illness, such as a language barrier and a need for information. Thus, besides overcoming the language barrier by using independent interpreters, instructing this subpopulation about health and illness is needed.